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Regulators and Businesses Join Forces to Tackle Pollution By Maureen Gorsen Director, Department of Toxic Substances Control

Both large and small businesses in California have reduced the generation of hazardous waste by millions of pounds over the last five years by partnering with California Environmental Protection Agency's Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC). By participating in volunteer pollution prevention programs, businesses have cut costs, increased productivity and worker safety, and have reduced their impact on the environment.

Take the automobile industry, for example. Used oil is the largest volume of hazardous waste generated in California. DTSC established several projects to tackle this problem. The Model Shop Program was one of these. It focused on helping auto repair shops develop practices to reduce the amount of hazardous wastes generated. These pollution prevention measures also helped increase shop operators' ability to comply with environmental regulations. Over 65 facilities, both large and small, were certified as Model Shops, including 38 State fleets.

In another effort to reduce waste oil, DTSC partnered with the California's Department of General Services, Department of Corrections, and UC Davis, and embarked on a pilot study that could reduce the amount of motor oil waste generated by the entire State vehicle fleet by up to 50 percent --100,000 gallons annually. If the test is successful, potentially 25 million gallons of waste motor oil can be saved if California drivers follow the state's lead.

The healthcare industry has also played an active role in pollution prevention. In order to reduce the amount of mercury entering the environment, DTSC developed the Mercury (Hg) Elimination Leadership Program (HELP). This volunteer program encouraged medical facilities to eliminate the use mercury-containing devices such as thermometers and blood-pressure cuffs. Under this program hospitals in the San Francisco Bay Area, Los Angeles and the Central Valley teamed together to eliminate two tons of mercury from their medical facilities.

Through DTSC's Mercury Switch Recovery Program, the automobile industry was also enlisted to help. This program requires auto dismantlers to remove mercury-containing light switches before shredding and melting down automobiles for recycling, thus keeping this toxic substance from contaminating air, soil and water.

More recently, hundreds of California retailers from large stores like IKEA to small individually owned Ace Hardware stores, and nonprofits such as Goodwill are participating in a volunteer effort to prevent batteries, electronic devices and fluorescent lamps from being discarded into landfills by becoming partners in the "California Take-It-Back Partnership." The partnership enlists the participation of corporations, retailers, nonprofits, and state and local governments to provide California consumers with free and convenient locations to drop off these items for appropriate recycling.

Pollution Prevention Program Impacts:

- 95-million pound reduction in hazardous waste generated from California oil refineries in 2002.
- \$14 million in savings for oil refineries from annual disposal fees in 2002.
- 2 tons of mercury eliminated from California hospitals since 2003.
- \$7,000 estimated saving for each small auto repair shop that implements DTSC's pollution prevention best management practices.
- 1,287 tons of absorbent material such as kitty litter not purchased and not being disposed of in our landfills. (It would take 1,000 pick-up truck loads to get all this kitty litter to the dump.)
- 30,000 gallons of oil not needing to be extracted from the litter or, worst case, being sent to a land fill.
- 360 fewer employees exposed to chemicals that may pose health risks.

In recognition of National Pollution Prevention Week, Sept. 18-24, California Environmental Protection Agency Secretary Linda Adams will recognize the following businesses for their pollution prevention accomplishments: Toyota, Western States Petroleum Association, California State Automobile Association, Catholic Healthcare West, Kaiser, Chemical Industry Council of California, California Autobody Association and the Marina Recreation Association of California.

These businesses represent well over \$50 billion in sales annually in California, so their commitment to pollution prevention will have a tremendous impact on preserving and protecting the environment and public health.

To find out how your business can profit from pollution prevention, please visit the DTSC website www.dtsc.ca.gov/PollutionPreventionControl for more information.